

**Department of Health and Human Services**

**OFFICE OF  
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**Child Support Enforcement State  
Satisfaction Survey**

**Case Studies**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## PURPOSE

To develop case studies for six State child support enforcement programs to supplement a recently completed child support enforcement State satisfaction survey. Overall, this survey found that most States are satisfied with the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) and praise the increased Federal/State partnership in the program.

## BACKGROUND

These case studies are a follow-up to a recently completed inspection, “Child Support Enforcement State Satisfaction Survey,” OEI-02-97-00310. We conducted these case studies in order to obtain supplemental, qualitative information on State programs and to speak with child support staff from different levels in the program.

The Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) requested that we survey States to determine their experiences and satisfaction with OCSE, and to identify any areas for improvement. In that survey we found that most States are satisfied overall with both the central and regional OCSE offices, although they rate some regional offices higher than others. States rate OCSE high on communication, coordination, recent contacts, and program support, and believe that the Federal offices work with them as partners. States offer suggestions for improving their relationship with OCSE, including improving the timeliness of communications to States and strengthening the role of regional offices. They would also like OCSE to provide more systems and practical support and training, continue to improve the audit process, and improve the timeliness of the Annual Report to Congress.

The Child Support Enforcement Program was established in 1975 under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. The goal of this program is to ensure that children, from both Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and non-TANF families, are financially supported by both parents. It is administered at the State level and overseen Federally by OCSE. The OCSE has its central office in Washington D.C. and 10 regional offices throughout the country. A recently completed Strategic Plan emphasized the forging of Federal/State partnerships.

We selected six States for site visits: Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, South Carolina and Texas. In selecting these States, we looked for variation in the level of satisfaction noted in the earlier survey. We also selected States from different regions and with different program administration. In each State, we conducted interviews with respondents from both the State and local or county level. In presenting our individual case studies, we are reporting the opinions and perspectives of the respondents we interviewed and did not attempt to verify the accuracy of their responses. In addition to reporting each State case study individually, we conducted a cross-case analysis and report the results of this analysis in a cross-case summary.

## **CROSS-CASE SUMMARY**

### **Federal and State Roles**

Respondents in the six States we visited envision different roles for OCSE in the Child Support Enforcement program. Some favor more limited Federal involvement in the program, while others advocate an even stronger Federal role than currently exists. Respondents in the six States also have differing opinions about the role and value of their regional office, which range from describing that office as a vital resource to questioning its value. Despite these differences, respondents agree that OCSE provides important support to their State program. They do, however, believe OCSE should obtain State input on proposed regulations before finalizing them, and get new information and regulations to the States sooner.

### **Interstate Cases**

In five of the six States, respondents describe interstate cases as challenging and difficult. These respondents believe OCSE should play a stronger role in interstate cases and offer different suggestions for what type of role OCSE could play. These include facilitating more information sharing, providing better access to interstate case data, compiling an updated interstate case reference guide, mandating procedural uniformity between States, and intervening when one State is not cooperating with another State.

### **State Innovative Practices**

All of the States we visited have innovative practices that respondents believe contribute to the success of their child support programs. Some of these practices were funded with OCSE demonstration competitive grant funds. They vary widely across States, with some involving ways to enhance communication between players in the child support program and others focusing on ways to broaden their program's services. Respondents in all States believe in the importance of trying new approaches in order to succeed in an increasingly complex child support environment.

### **Future of the Program**

Most respondents are optimistic about the future of the program and believe it will become more successful and more responsive to the needs of the public. Many believe that automation will result in improved collection rates, program efficiency, and communication between States. Respondents also say the program will continue to incorporate a more comprehensive approach to serving families. Some say the challenge is to remain focused on collections while expanding the program. Finally, other respondents are concerned about anticipated funding changes due to welfare reform.

## **STATE CASE STUDIES**

In presenting the six State case studies, we report on each program's highlights, working relationships with OCSE, and suggestions for support. Significant variation exists between the six States for all three topics. These case studies are presented in the report following the cross-case summary.

## **COMMENTS**

We received comments on the draft report from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). They believe that most of the States' suggestions are pertinent and helpful, and ACF notes its efforts to work with the States to address the suggestions. A copy of the full text of ACF's comments is in Appendix A.